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First Sunday of Advent
November 29, 1992
"I Will Not Test God"
Isaiah 7:10-16

Isaiah juxtaposes his sublime vision, call, and response with the less sublime story of his first mission. God sends him to Ahaz, the good Uzziah's godless grandson, a man who ignored his heritage, defiled the Temple with an Assyrian altar, "sacrificed and burned incense on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree," and even "made his son pass through the fire."

Ahaz is in trouble; the Syrians threaten Jerusalem with Israel's aid and his doom seems certain. God sends Isaiah with the same comforting message He sent the shepherds: "have no fear."

Ahaz rejects the message of comfort and call to trust and tries to hide from God behind Holy Writ. Ahaz wants to do things his own way and play power-geopolitical games. God says "ask for a sign;" Ahaz refuses, citing the same injunction Christ will later use against Satan ("I will not test God."). In so doing, Ahaz lifts a command out of context and twists it to avoid doing something God instructs. God reminds Ahaz of the commandment's context (and therefore Ahaz's failure to keep his word) indirectly, when He responds that Ahaz shouldn't try God's patience, before giving Ahaz the sign anyway.

This story reminded me forcefully of Tevye, main character in "Fiddler on the Roof," who has a comical propensity for misquoting the Good Book. At one point he interrupts a comment to heaven (in which he is about to, as is his wont, misquote scripture) with the observation "Why should I tell You what the Good Book

says?" There are many things Tevye is not, but he is a man of faith.

Like Tevye, we need to recognize that God knows best what He means and that our job isn't to remind Him of His words. God says that we should follow Him without fear. How often do we, in fear of the future or open rebellion, try to hide behind some of God's words to avoid something we don't want to do? As we enter this Advent season, the time which commemorates God with us in the flesh, let us resolve to answer God's call with Isaiah's faith rather than Ahaz's rebellion.

PRAYER: Oh Lord, help me to remember that You call me to obedience and faith rather than the rebellion of legalism and fear. Give me clarity of hearing and strength to answer your call with Isaiah's warm enthusiasm rather than Ahaz's cold disinterest.

Ray Granada